Issue 8
Summer 2019

Newsletter

Welcome to the latest issue of the Surrey Dormouse Group Newsletter!

This issue contains a summary of stats from Surrey's dormice in 2018, together with a factsheet from Simone Bullion, who gave a fascinating talk to SDG about using footprint tunnels to detect dormice. We also have an intro to Roughs 2, a tribute to Marion Smith, and how birds used one particular dormouse box.

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Tribute to Marion Smith

SDG stalwart Marion Smith sadly passed away in May. Her son, Dave Smith, pays tribute.

I was sitting and talking with my old team, having a break from work, when mum came up in conversation. One of the team asked what she was like. Another, who knew mum said – "she's a lady you want on your side." Mum was certainly on the side of Surrey's dormice and Surrey Dormouse Group. She loved doing surveys. She loved helping others get their survey licences. When she was training new volunteers, she got a buzz from sharing her passion and knowledge about what I call 'ginger mice.'

Mum was the first of her school to go to university and when she graduated with her 2i in Biological Sciences she went onto research "Dutch Elm Disease" at Alice Holt. Although she completed her research, she never finished writing up her PhD. but her science training stayed with her. On any survey work, whether for dormice or cetaceans, she maintained high standards and ensured survey protocols were followed, whilst also creating a fun environment to learn in.

Mum enjoyed banter and had a great sense of humour. The first (and only) time I got bitten when handling a dormouse, it took me by surprise, and several expletives were uttered, much to her amusement. Dad being bitten generated similar merriment.

Although mum enjoyed dormouse work and her enjoyment increased more as she learnt about their ecology, I think she enjoyed it most when she was in the woods, with dormouse in hand. There is an intimate, special sense of connecting with nature when holding an animal and let's face it ginger mice are super cute. Mum appreciated that too!

I want to thank everyone who passed on kind words of support when mum died. Also, thank you to anyone who donated to the memorial JustGiving page (https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/marion-smith-2019) to support Cancer Research UK.

Surrey's dormice in 2018

Annabelle South looks at the 2018 data from NDMP sites in Surrey to see how the county's dormice fared

29 sites monitored **216** visits

10,593 boxes checked up by **93** from 2017

730 dormice found **9** fewer than 2017

1 median number of dormice per 50 boxes (the same as 2017)

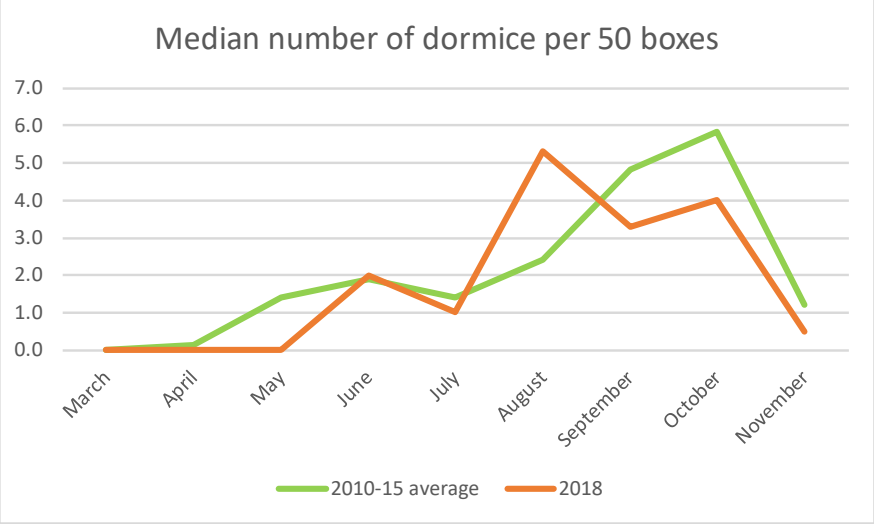
3.4 mean number of dormice per 50 boxes compared to **3.5** in 2017

40% visits without any dormice in 2017 compared to **39%** in 2017

35 highest number of dormice per 50 boxes compared to **44** in 2017

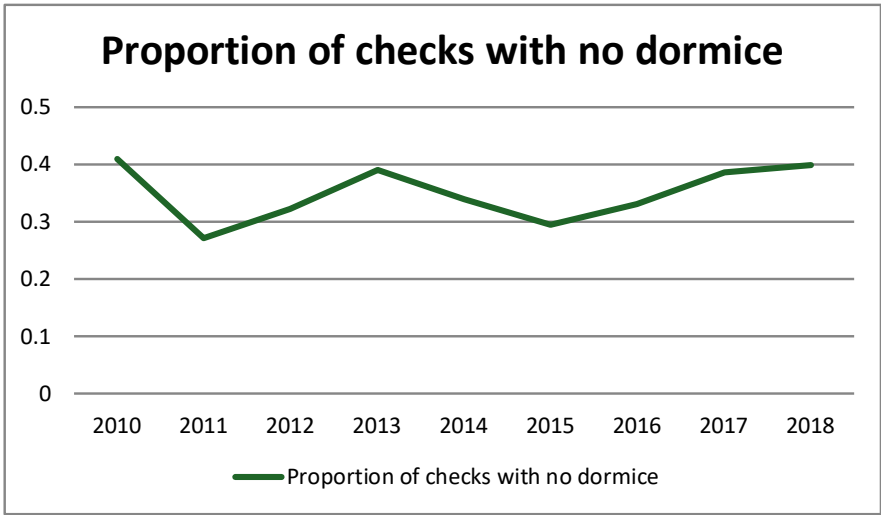
Overall, 2018 was very similar to 2017 for Surrey's dormice, whether you look at median or mean average. This was also reflected in the proportion of visits where no dormice were found.

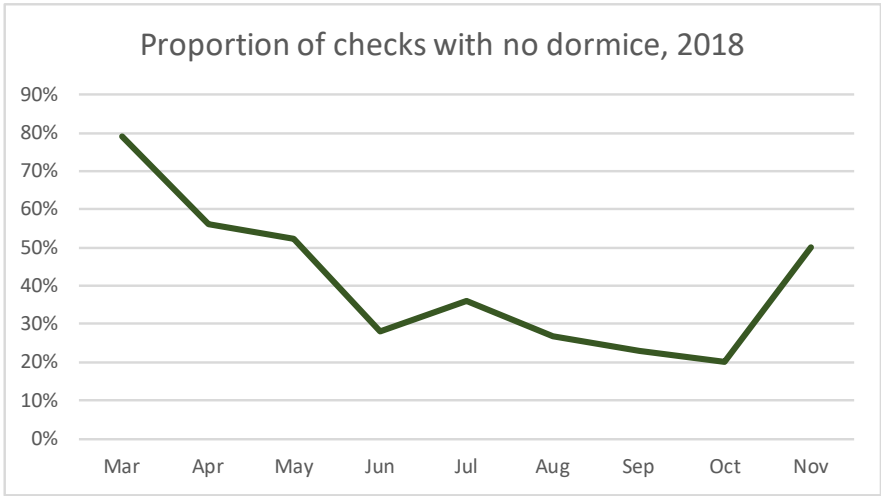
This chart shows the median number of dormice seen per 50 boxes by month, comparing 2018 to the average from 2010-2015. Overall numbers for 2018 are pretty similar to average, but it



looks like emergence from hibernation may have been a month later than usual, while the breeding peak seems to have been earlier.

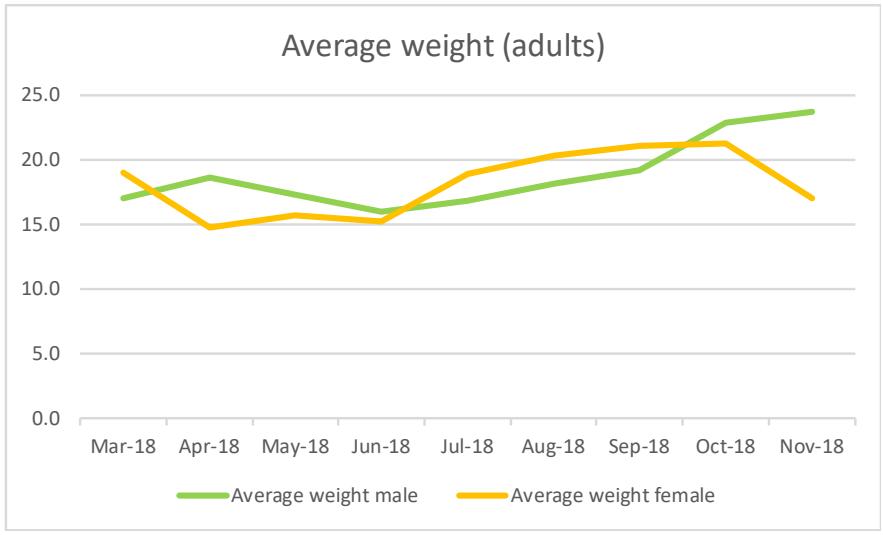
There was a higher chance of not finding any dormice at a box check in 2018 than most other years since 2010, with none found at four in every 10 box checks carried out. Only three sites reported having no checks without finding dormice, but one of those sites was only surveyed in July, August and October. As you can see from the second graph to the right, those are all months with a good chance of finding dormice.





Dormice were not always very particular about their nests, with seven adults and one youngster being found in other (non-dormouse) nests (mostly wrens), and 10 adults and five youngsters found without any kind of nest.

As you would expect, average weights of adult dormice varied throughout the year, and also by sex. In the first part of the year males were generally heavier than females, but once the breeding season kicked off, females overtook the males until the autumn.



One and a half males were found for every female found in March and April, but from May to October we found more females than males. By November we were finding 10 males to every female.

Throughout the year we found more active than torpid dormice, although females seem more likely to be found torpid than males, with the difference especially noticeable in March, April and June.

The first pinkies were found on 17th June, the first greys with eyes closed and eyes open on 22 July.

24 adults and 22 young were noted to have white tail tips, and 15 adults and four young had stumpy tails. Only four adults were noted to have black tail tips.

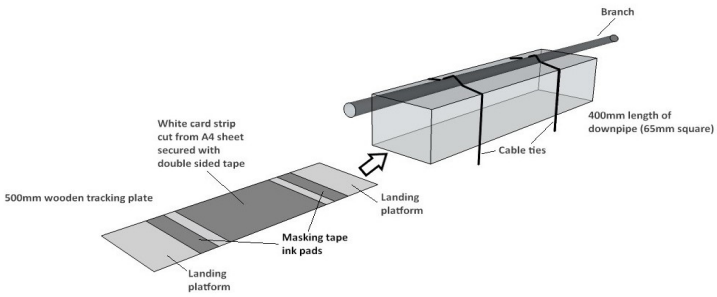
January 2019: Simone Bullion & Alison Looser. Suffolk Wildlife Trust. info@suffolkwildlifetrust.org

Guidance for using Hazel Dormouse Footprint Tunnels

This guidance is intended to be used by those who already have some experience of hazel dormouse ecology and surveying, or who have received appropriate training in the use of footprint tunnels. Footprint detection, using tunnels, has been demonstrated to have much higher detection rates when compared with nest tubes and nest boxes. This is not surprising as it only takes a fleeting moment at the entrance of a tunnel for the evidence to be obtained, compared with the amount of time required to construct a nest. Consequently, this method can be used alone or in combination with other methods depending on the purpose of the survey. The tunnels should be secured horizontally beneath branches and bramble stems in similar locations to those chosen for placing nest

Equipment

The footprint tunnels we used are made of 400mm lengths of 65mm square black downpipe, with a 500mm length of 9mm plywood insert forming a tracking plate with a landing platform at each end. If smaller lengths are used the paper is more likely to become wet. They should be tied to the underside of horizontal branches in dense shrub habitat, (unless they can be securely fastened above.) We used black cable ties of 380mm x 4.7mm.


Branch
400mm length of downpipe (65mm square)
White card strip cut from A4 sheet secured with double sided tape
Cable ties
500mm wooden tracking plate
Landing platform
Masking tape ink pads
Landing platform

Centrally, on the plywood insert, is a strip of thick white card (250gsm/350mic) attached by double-sided sticky tape at each end. Spare cards can be prepared in advance of surveys. A strip of masking tape is placed at each end of the card, but not overlapping it, upon which the tracking medium is painted. No bait is used, so as to reduce the amount of activity by non target species and to reduce the impact of grey squirrels. Number the tunnels on the underside of the tracking plate.

Tracking Medium

The 'ink' is made up by mixing 3 heaped teaspoons of ultra fine pharmaceutical grade activated charcoal powder (deemed safe for dormice) with 15 level teaspoons of olive oil. This makes enough for approximately 50 tunnels. This is applied to the masking tape with an inexpensive square ended artists paintbrush. This should be made up in advance and transported into the field in a suitable container.

Survey Methodology

The tunnels should be checked and re-inked every 2 weeks. This is because the ink dries out and the papers can become damaged by molluscs or mice, or become mouldy if the weather has been wet. The papers should be changed if there has been any footprint activity or deterioration in quality. Surveying should be avoided during heavy rain as the papers do not stick effectively when wet. The masking tape should be replaced only if required.

N° of tunnels	Survey duration	N° of Checks
50	3 months	6
40	4 months	8
30	5 months	10

Use the table to decide how long to survey for the number of tunnels. Do not count April or November, although surveys can continue into November if preceding months are negative. This gives a 95% chance of detecting dormice, even at low densities.

Costs

Footprint tunnels using sections of downpipe and a wooden insert cost approximately the same as a nest tube . However, there are additional costs for consumables such as card, charcoal powder, oil and cable ties.

Further information is in Bullion, S., Looser, A. & Langton, S. (2018) An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Footprint Tracking Tunnels for Detecting Hazel Dormice. *In Practice*—Bulletin of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, **101:** 36—41**.**

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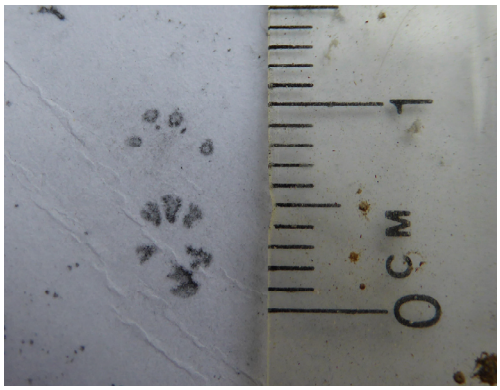
How to distinguish *Muscardinus* footprints from *Apodemus* footprints

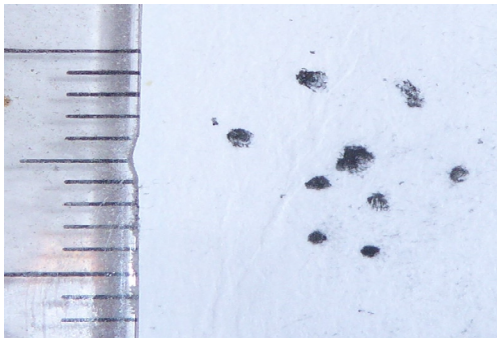
Hazel dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*)

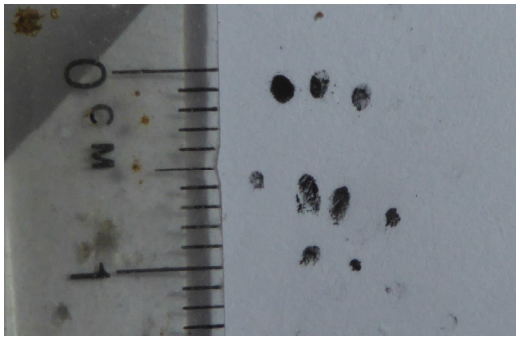
Front foot **Hind foot**



Apodemus species (Very difficult to distinguish between wood mouse (*Apodemus sylvaticus*) and yellow necked mouse (*Apodemus flavicollis*)

Front foot **Hind foot**





All photos

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The many different species at Roughs 2

Jess Smith introduces us to Roughs 2

Roughs 2 is one of three sites just off Newlands Corner which was previously managed by Guildford Borough Council. The site is made up of coppiced hazel and some large patches of yew trees. We are not sure when the monitoring stopped there but we think it was over 10 years ago. In 2016, Surrey Dormouse Group got permission to start monitoring the site(s) and to install new boxes as most of the old ones had disintegrated or gone missing! The site was set up in June 2016 and monitoring started the following month.

The first few months at Roughs 2 were a bit slow. Dedicated volunteers came out month after month and got excited over small bits of moss or a thread of honeysuckle! The first resident to use one of our boxes was a wood mouse in October 2016 and in November 2016 we found our first dormouse nest – although still no sign of the mouse who made it!

In March 2017, whilst cleaning out the boxes, we found our first torpid dormouse! She had built a lovely nest in box 28, which still remains to this day as it was lovely, well woven and dry. It has since provided a ready-made home for passing dormice for almost three years! Later in 2017, we had our first litter of dormice, a small collection of grey eyes closed! Since then, dormouse numbers at Roughs 2 have been steady, with a peak count of 7 on one check last year.

At Roughs 2, we also get lots of other species using the boxes! We have our fair share of wood mice, which have used the boxes to breed in several times. We also get yellow necked mice, which can look just like wood mice, so always get out any individuals to look for the distinctive yellow neck. We have also had pygmy shrews, hornets, bees, wax moths, wrens and many, many blue tits! This year has been a bumper year for blue tits using the boxes, with a peak count of 85 baby birds on one check! When you open a box at Roughs 2, you never know what you will find!

Torpid dormouse at Roughs 2 (photo courtesy of Jess Smith)

Yellow necked mouse (photo courtesy of Jess Smith)

Bluetit chicks (photo courtesy of Jess Smith)

National Dormouse Conference 2019

PTES are holding a National Dormouse Conference on Saturday 16th November, 10am-4.30pm at the University of Reading.

The National Dormouse Conference is a must for all dormouse monitoring volunteers to learn more about hazel dormouse conservation and meet up with fellow wildlife enthusiasts. The day will be packed full of exciting talks from the country's top dormouse experts and researchers.

£40 for NDMP volunteers, £80 for ecologists. https://ptes.org/event/national-dormouse-conference-2019/

Useful links

- Surrey Dormouse Group
- Surrey Dormouse Group Facebook group
- PTES training information
- Dormouse monitor
- Wildwood
- British Wildlife Centre

Contact us

info@surreydormousegroup.org.uk

The dormouse box and birds

Dave Williams shares what's been going on in a spare dormouse box in his garden this spring

I had been out cleaning boxes and replacing some and came back with a spare box not used. Instead of putting it away I left it on a garden chair just outside my shed. The next day I went down to the shed and noticed a blue tit fly away from near the box, I thought nothing of it, until I went down again and saw the blue tit fly away. I looked in the box and saw some moss and some strips, yes the start of a nest. I was concerned as it was in a vulnerable place and I could not avoid going past it. After a couple of days I did not see the bird and looked in the box, no change, no more nesting material had been added. I figured it had been disturbed too much and gave up. I thought it must be short of a nesting site, so I put the box against a small building in my garden, back to front with the hole more accessible. Within two days a blue tit, hopefully the same one had found it and successfully reared a brood of young.

In June I noticed to my delight a pair of spotted flycatchers. A few days later I spotted some moss on the roof of the dormouse box, another nest started. After a few more days I saw the flycatcher fly off so I took a quick peep and saw eggs in the nest. I had to make a detour in my garden to avoid disturbance and eventually after quite a few weeks they fledged, and we were treated to views of mother feeding young. It has been over twenty years since I saw a spotted flycatcher in my garden, and I understand they have declined over the last decade, so I am pleased to assist in their conservation.

This dormouse box was a tempting abode for bluetits (photo courtesy of Dave Williams)

Dave moved the box to a less exposed place (photo courtesy of Dave Williams)

Flycatcher nest on top of the box (photo courtesy of Dave Williams)